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M. Schneider

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XI

INR WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS

No. 51, April 5, 1978

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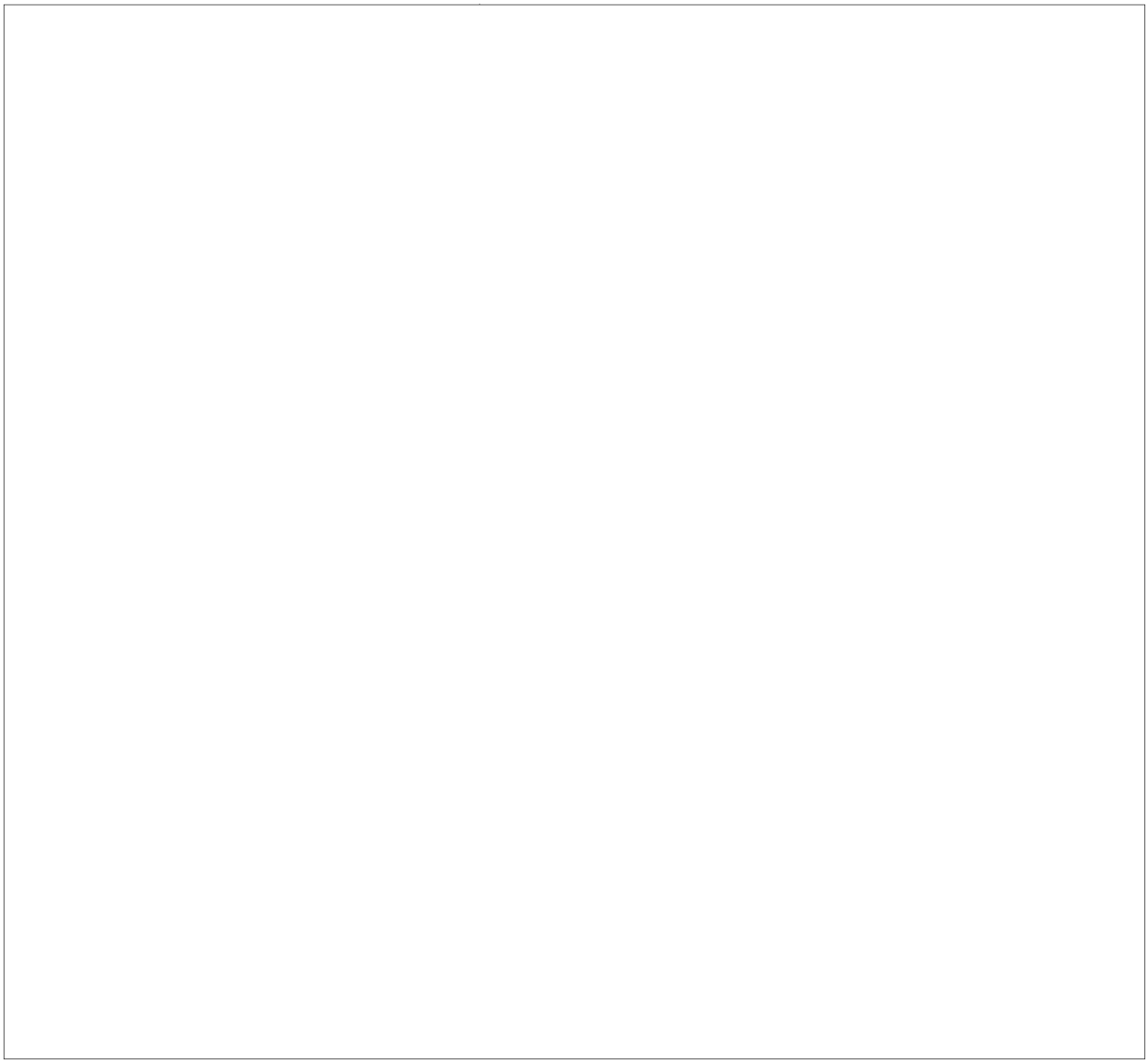

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Argentina

Current Rights Situation (INR Review and Analysis). Positive human rights developments in Argentina since January have included restoration of the "right of option" enabling executive (state-of-siege) prisoners to petition for exile, an apparent although unverifiable decline in the rate of disappearances, serial publication of a list of officially acknowledged executive detainees, and responsive action on US high-interest cases.

These advances have been offset, however, by continued disappearances, harassment of religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, lack of evidence that renegade security elements are being disciplined, and the reported discovery of the bodies of seven human rights activists abducted last December. None of the seven activists, two of whom were French nuns, was known to have been connected with subversive groups.

Current official perceptions of the human rights issue apparently are influenced by expectations that US rights policy will become less assertive in the months ahead. Factors contributing to this Argentine judgment may include:

--their interpretation of statements by US officials concerning the need to reconsider the instrumentalities of US policy;

--their belief that terrorist incidents in Western Europe and the Middle East have "toughened" the West's attitude on security/human rights questions and produced greater understanding of Argentina's situation; and

--their perception that the US has acquiesced, or at least agreed to disagree, in the face of Brazil's firm bilateral stance on human rights.

The disappearances, which now probably number several thousand, are the heart of Argentina's human rights problem.

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Most of the disappearances probably can be attributed to the security forces (and it is during illegal detentions and subsequent interrogations that the most egregious human rights violations occur.) Figures compiled by Argentine human rights advocates show a decline in the frequency of disappearances in early 1978 as compared with mid-1977. It is not clear, however, whether the drop reflects increased official respect for legal procedures, or only fewer potential targets.

When completed, serial publication of the executive detainee list will add a new dimension to the "disappeareds" issue. Domestic and foreign human rights groups, interested individuals, and possibly some governments will demand an accounting of those who allegedly were abducted but did not appear on the composite list. No public accounting will be rendered, however. The government almost surely will stay with the explanation it has already given, i.e., that counter-terrorist excesses have been responsible for an unspecified but small number of disappearances, and the remainder are attributable to a variety of causes. (SECRET/EXDIS/NOFORN/NOCONRACT)

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